



**What Every Worker Should Know**

**How to Protect  
Yourself From  
Needlestick  
Injuries**

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**  
Public Health Service  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health  
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## What infections can be caused by needlestick injuries?

Needlestick injuries can expose workers to a number of blood-borne pathogens that can cause serious or fatal infections. The pathogens that pose the most serious health risks are

- Hepatitis B virus (HBV)
- Hepatitis C virus (HCV)
- Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)—the virus that causes AIDS

HBV vaccination is recommended for all health care workers (unless they are immune because of previous exposure). HBV vaccine has proved highly effective in preventing infection in workers exposed to HBV. However, no vaccine exists to prevent HCV or HIV infection.

*Preventing needlestick injuries is the best way to protect yourself from these infections.*

## Who is at risk of needlestick injury?

Any worker who may come in contact with needles is at risk, including *nursing staff, lab workers, doctors, and housekeepers.*

## How common are needlestick injuries among health care workers?

Estimates indicate that 600,000 to 800,000 needlestick injuries occur each year. Unfortunately, about half of these injuries are not reported. *Always report needlestick injuries to your employer to ensure that you receive appropriate followup care.*

## What kinds of needles usually cause needlestick injuries?

- Hypodermic needles
- Blood collection needles
- Suture needles
- Needles used in IV delivery systems

## Do certain work practices increase the risk of needlestick injury?

Yes. Past studies have shown that needlestick injuries are often associated with these activities:

- Recapping needles
- Transferring a body fluid between containers
- Failing to dispose of used needles properly in puncture-resistant sharps containers

## How can I protect myself from needlestick injuries?

- Avoid the use of needles where safe and effective alternatives are available.
- Help your employer select and evaluate devices with safety features that reduce the risk of needlestick injury.
- Use devices with safety features provided by your employer.
- Avoid recapping needles.
- Plan for safe handling and disposal of needles before using them.
- Promptly dispose of used needles in appropriate sharps disposal containers.
- Report all needlestick and sharps-related injuries promptly to ensure that you receive appropriate followup care.
- Tell your employer about any needlestick hazards you observe.
- Participate in training related to infection prevention.
- Get a hepatitis B vaccination.

For additional information, see *NIOSH Alert: Preventing Needlestick Injuries in Health Care Settings* [DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 2000-108]. Single copies of the Alert are available from the following:

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*Needlestick injuries can lead to serious or fatal infections. Health care workers who use or may be exposed to needles are at increased risk of needlestick injury. All workers who are at risk should take steps to protect themselves from this significant health hazard.*